Dangerous Liaisons in a Pandemic:
An Open Letter to "Plan B" from FACT (Fight Against Conspiracy Theories)

Anti-misinformation campaigners call on Covid Plan B members to end their support of Voices for Freedom and to condemn groups promoting conspiracy theories

FACT (Fight Against Conspiracy Theories) is an informal group of New Zealand academics, health workers and professionals who want to stop the spread of dangerous misinformation about Covid 19 and vaccines. This letter supports the right of well-informed experts to contribute to the public health discussion. It opposes bringing disinformation and misinformation into the conversation.

FACT is concerned about "Plan B" – a group of NZ health professionals who say they want a 'balanced approach to Covid-19', including Dr. Simon Thornley from the University of Auckland – and its partnership with Voices for Freedom, an anti-lockdown, "vaccine skeptic" lobby group which promotes misinformation and harmful conspiracy theories and encourages its followers not to follow public health guidelines to protect against Covid 19.

FACT and the signatories below ask Plan B to

1. Issue a statement which unequivocally rejects harmful conspiracy theories and those who promote them.
2. Stop working with Voices for Freedom and promoting it as a reputable source of information.

Plan B has supported the ideas of Voices for Freedom (VfF) on several occasions. It has also worked with the group to promote its online events. Dr. Simon Thornley was recently the keynote speaker at a VfF event in Auckland and Plan B has also provided speakers for VfF's social media content.

VfF founder Claire Deeks is a former candidate and current board member of Advance NZ. In recent weeks, VfF has worked with Advance NZ to distribute a fake newspaper which pushes conspiracy theories and medical misinformation (the Herald and RNZ reported about "The Real News").

VfF is also a key player in New Zealand's conspiracy driven "Freedom Movement". During the recent level 3 lockdown in Auckland, it worked with far-right and fringe groups to organise an illegal protest outside the Prime Minister's office. At this event, Claire Deeks joined speakers Damien De Ment and Sarah Smith - both prominent promoters of QAnon conspiracy theories - and Carol Sakey, who spreads the "Great Replacement" theory which inspired the Christchurch terrorist attack.

FACT supports open public discussion about sensible responses to Covid-19 from all angles. But when those who claim to be experts in the medical field are seen to endorse groups which promote conspiracy theories and lies that cause harm, they are not acting responsibly for the greater good.

"We believe that it's inappropriate for Plan B – a group that claims it wants to promote rational fact-based discussion – to legitimise Voices for Freedom", says Andrew Mackie, a FACT spokesperson. "Voices for Freedom claims to be a harmless group of health-conscious mums, but the reality is more sinister. It actively promotes conspiracy theories and medical misinformation and supports political extremists. Plan B consists of academics and doctors who should know better than to support and legitimise Voices for Freedom."

https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/the-real-news-who-is-really-behind-the-covid-19-conspiracy-magazine-being-dropped-into-60000-letterboxes/V3CSQAQNUD4RCEUXXB7YPHZDNQ/

Siouxsie Wiles (microbiologist, University of Auckland)

Des Gorman (professor, University of Auckland)

Linda-Jean Kenix (professor, University of Canterbury)

Ekant Veer (professor, University of Canterbury)

Christian Schott (associate professor, Victoria University)

Uwe Ring (professor, Stockholm University, formerly University of Canterbury)

Roger Boyce (senior lecturer, University of Canterbury)

Geoff Stahl (senior lecturer, Victoria University)

Behrouz Boochani (research fellow, University of Canterbury)

Lexie Matheson (senior lecturer, AUT)

Joel Rindelaub (research fellow, University of Auckland)

Lorenzo Buscicchi (teaching assistant, University of Waikato)

Alison Campbell (honorary fellow, University of Waikato)

Geoffrey Handsfield (senior research fellow, University of Auckland)

Rachael Davidson (toxicologist, University of Otago)

Brin Ryder (immunologist, University of Otago)

Amanda Lyver (paediatric oncologist, Christchurch)

Tamsin Dovell (anaesthetist, Christchurch)

Sharon English (urologist, Christchurch)

Antony Alford (anaesthetist, Christchurch)

Joanna Romanowska (cosmetic surgeon, Auckland)

Frank Kueppers (urologist, Christchurch)

Nick Buchan (urologist, Christchurch)

Jenny Blasingame (obstetrician and gynecologist, Whangarei)

Elspeth Frascatore (emergency physician, Auckland)

Sandra Paterson (urgent care doctor, Mount Maunganui)

Sarah Hart (cosmetic doctor, Auckland)

Michelle Snape (emergency physician, Christchurch)

Ruth Spearing (haematologist, Christchurch)

Sarah Clarke (urgent care doctor)

Caitlin Northern (GP, Napier)

Mary Stonehouse (paediatrician, Gisborne)

Miriam Martin (GP, Christchurch)

Lauren Cumberpatch (GP, Christchurch)

Johanne Egan (urgent care doctor, Auckland)

Helen Allen (obstretrician, Waitemata)

Catherine Hurd (GB, Northland)

Sally Talbot (GP, Wellington)

Renate Tolks (GP, Auckland)

Katy Smith (GP, New Plymouth)

Caroline Ansley (GP, Christchurch)

Richard Clinghan (GP, Oxford)

Adrian Gamble (GP, Christchurch)

Jane Hutchison (medical doctor, Christchurch)

Michelle Bayley (medical doctor, Christchurch)

Marissa Kelaher (medical doctor, Nelson)

Rebecca Weight (veterinarian surgeon, Christchurch)

Sylvia McLean (veterinarian, Christchurch)

Henare Parata (Atuakore: Māori Atheists and Freethinkers)

Joe Trinder (indigenous rights activist)

Anita Fenton (occupational therapist, Christchurch)

Sea Rotmann (behaviour change researcher, Wellington)

Jan Jeans (counsellor, Christchurch)

Paul Wilson (psychotherapist, Auckland)

Michael Apathy (psychotherapist, Christchurch)

Beth St. Claire (psychotherapist, Auckland)

Paul Baakman (psychotherapist, Christchurch)

Selina Clare (psychotherapist, Christchurch)

James Driver (psychotherapist, Christchurch)

James Weaver (counsellor, psychotherapist intern, Christchurch)

Honalee Hunter (counsellor, Christchurch)

Jazelle Alderdice (psychotherapist, Christchurch)

Yasmeen Jones-Chollet (nurse, Nelson)

Andrea Solzer (paediatric nurse, Christchurch)

Grant Brookes (past president, New Zealand Nurses Organisation)

Mark Honeychurch (evidence-based healthcare activist, Wellington)

Daniel Ryan (evidence-based healthcare activist, Wellington)

Dave Hansford (science writer)

Tina Ngata (independent researcher and PhD scholar, Wharekahika)

Michéle A'Court (writer, comedian)

Donna Miles (columnist)

Anke Richter (independent journalist, Christchurch)

Society for Science Based Healthcare

Humanist Society of New Zealand

New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists

NZ Skeptics

Dr Helen Clement, Obstetrician Gynaecologist, Rotorua

Dr Adrienne Henderson GP - Whangarei

Joanna Coates - Consultant in Anaesthesia - Northland DHB

Angela Lawson GP Taranaki

Ashleigh Brown, Paediatric registrar, Auckland

Olivia Albert, Consultant Anaesthetist, Auckland

Tania Moerenhout, GP and lecturer, Dunedin

Dr Rebekah Wilson GP Auckland

Dr Chris Ansley, Psychiatrist, Christchurch Hospital

Dr Chris Hopkins, infectious diseases physician at Middlemore Hospital, Auckland

Dr. Michael Pye, Registered Nurse, Manawatu

Rosalind Pochin. General Surgeon. Nelson

Dr AnneMarie Tangney. GP. Dunedin

Vicki Robertson, Obstetrician Gynaecologist, Greymouth

Dr Lorraine van Schalkwyk. Physician, Auckland

Ruth Lennox, Paediatrician Bangladesh

Maryam Mussa, paediatric registrar, Auckland

Justine Lancaster, General Practitioner , Wellington

Dr Yvette A. Kelly, Psychiatrist, Waitemata DHB

Dr Karina Cooper, GP in South Auckland

Dr Lauren Elizabeth, consultant anaesthetist, Northland

Dr AnneMarie Tangney. GP. Dunedin

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Dr Karina Cooper, GP in South Auckland

Dr Lauren Elizabeth, consultant anaesthetist, Northland

Dr matt woollett General practitioner Te Atatū Auckland

Dr Dan Wilson, Scientist: Molecular and Structural Biology, Carnegie Mellon University (Also of Debunk the Funk Youtube channel focusing mainly on misinformation around covid and vaccinations)

Dr Anne Hurly, GP, Wairoa (109)

If you'd like to sign this letter, please email Andrew Mackie, factaotearoa@gmail.com